

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 9743

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 1457

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3

TAGS: PINT, HO

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH COLONEL CASTRO

1. MISSION OFFICER HAD CONVERSATION APRIL 12 WITH COLONEL CECILIO CASTRO BARRIENTOS, FORMER CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE ARMED FORCES, WHO IS WIDELY RESPECTED BY MISSION MEMBERS. CASTRO WAS GREATLY UPSET ABOUT THE ABRUPT REORGANIZATION OF THE MILITARY COMMAND STRUCTURE. HE DEEPLY REGRETTED THE FACT THAT GOOD OFFICERS ARE BEING REMOVED ALONG WITH THE BAD ONES.

2. HE SAID THAT THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL MEETING ON MARCH 31 LASTED ALMOST ALL DAY. LOPEZ WAS PRESENTED WITH A DOCUMENT THAT VIRTUALLY AMOUNTED TO AN ULTIMATUM. ACCORDING TO CASTRO, COLONEL CARLOS VILLANUEVA DOBLADO STOOD UP AND ASKED LOPEZ WHETHER HE WAS GOING TO ACCEPT THE DEMANDS. LOPEZ REPLIED THAT HE WOULD AND VILLANUEVA SAID THAT HE INTENDED TO RESIGN. CASTRO TOLD LOPEZ THAT HE WOULD RETURN HOME AND AWAIT FURTHER ORDERS.

3. CASTRO SAID THAT LOPEZ WILL PROBABLY LEAVE OFFICE PRIOR TO THE FINDINGS OF THE INVESTIGATION COMMISSION. HE INDICATED THAT HE THOUGHT LOPEZ WAS GUILTY OF TAKING THE UB BRIBE.

4. CASTRO SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN OFFERED A DIPLOMATIC POST IN MEXICO CITY BUT HAD TURNED IT DOWN BECAUSE HE CANNOT STAND HIGH ALTITUDES. HE REMARKED THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO BE NAMED
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ATTACHE OR AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED STATES. HOWEVER, HE

COMMENTED THAT HE WOULD ACCEPT ANY REASONABLE POST THAT IS OFFERED TO HIM.

5. HE STATED THAT THE LT. COLONEL'S GROUP IS IN FULL CONTROL OF THE SITUATION. HE DESCRIBED THEM AS YOUNG AND INEXPERIENCED, AND QUESTIONED THEIR ABILITY TO DEAL WITH THE SERIOUS PROBLEMS WHICH CONFRONT THE COUNTRY.

6. COMMENT: IT IS PROBABLE THAT LOPEZ' RESIGNATION OR REMOVAL FROM POWER IS NEAR. PERHAPS HE COULD HAVE SURVIVED THE MILITARY REORGANIZATION FOR A WHILE BUT THE UB BRIBE STORY COMING IN QUICK SUCCESSION, MAKES THIS UNLIKELY NOW. THE REAL QUESTION IS HOW AND WHEN HE WILL LEAVE POWER, RATHER THAN WHETHER HE WILL DO SO. AT THIS STAGE, IT APPEARS THAT HE MAY WELL RESIGN PRIOR TO THE FINDINGS OF THE INVESTIGATION COMMISSION IF IT APPEARS THAT THE COMMISSION IS DEVELOPING INCRIMINATING EVIDENCE. IT DOES NOT SEEM LIKELY THAT THE LT. COLONEL'S GROUP WILL BE WILLING TO SETTLE FOR THE SACRIFICE OF SOME LESSER SCAPEGOATS, EVEN THOUGH THERE ARE MANY STORIES CIRCULATING THAT SUCH A SCHEME MAY BE ATTEMPTED.
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